

House-Burial, with Examples in Derbyshire.

(Concluded from vol. xli., p. 161).

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NORTH AMERICAN "ALTARS."

IN North American barrows the floors and hearths of dwelling-places have been mistaken for "altars."

The contents of these barrows have a very strong resemblance to what we find in Derbyshire and elsewhere in the British Isles. To call these American barrows "sacrificial mounds" is misleading, and probably such an opinion would not be given by any modern antiquary.

"The name of sacrificial mounds," says Dr. Wilson, "has been conferred on a class of ancient monuments, altogether peculiar to the New World, and highly illustrative of the rites and customs of the ancient races of the mounds. This remarkable class of mounds has been very carefully explored, and their most noticeable characteristics are, their almost invariable occurrence within enclosures; their regular construction in uniform layers of gravel, earth, and sand, disposed alternately in strata conformable to the shape of the mound; and their covering a symmetrical altar of burnt clay or stone, on which are deposited numerous relics, in all instances exhibiting traces, more or less abundant, of their having been exposed to the action of fire." The so-called "altar" is a basin or table of burnt clay, carefully shaped into a symmetrical form, but varying much both in shape and size. Some are round, some elliptical, and others squares or parallelograms, while in size they vary from two feet to fifty feet by twelve or fifteen. The usual

dimensions, however, are from five to eight feet. They are almost always found within sacred enclosures; of the whole number examined by Messrs. Squire and Davis there were only four which were exterior to the walls of enclosures, and these were but a few rods distant from them."

The "altar" is always on a level with the natural soil, and bears traces of long-continued heat; in one instance, where it appears to have been formed of sand, instead of clay, the sand for a depth of two inches is discoloured as if fatty matter of some sort had been burned into it. In this case a second deposit of sand had been placed on the first, and upon this stones a little larger than a hen's egg were arranged so as to form a pavement, reminding us of the ancient hearths in the Danish kitchen middens.¹

The so-called "sacred enclosures" are merely small villages surrounded by some kind of fence, and here, as in the British Isles, we have examples of one hearth piled on the top of another.

Writing of such mounds, Stevens says: "If we imagine that the 'altars' were the clay floors of dwellings, and that (as among the Buraets) a good fire was constantly kept burning upon them, we should in such a house, *if used finally as a sepulchre*, have an 'altar' not unlike those met with in the Ohio mounds," that is, in the mounds which we have just been describing. The "altars" are in the form of basins made of fine clay brought to the spot from a distance,² as we have seen was the case in some Yorkshire barrows opened by Mr. Mortimer. The dip of the basins is very slight.

In "Mound City" near the town of Chillicothe, Ohio, there are twenty-three mounds surrounded by a bank between three and four feet high, accompanied by a

¹ Wilson in Lubbock's *Pre-historic Times*, 1865, p. 317.

² Stevens, *Flint Chips*, pp. 349, 354.

ditch.³ The enclosure is on the bank of a river. It is of rectangular form, with two gateways.

The mounds in Ohio seem to contain the floors of huts; with broken smoking-pipes and other remains, as well as old and quite modern secondary interments.

“Altar” mounds resembling those of Ohio probably exist in other parts of America. Mr. Donald Gunn has described one on the east side of Red River, near Red River Settlement, in the Hudson’s Bay Territory, which was opened in 1866. Some secondary interments were found, and beneath these, upon the level of the surface soil, there was “a floor of very smooth and hard white mud, which appeared to have been hardened by the action of fire.” On this clay floor were “four or five skulls on the face; a number of small bones those of fingers and toes; an earthen kettle with a shell in it, such as live at present in this river; bones of the beaver; two pipes of blue stone, without a perforation; three ornaments made of shell or bone; one perforated shell; and a few shell beads.” The Indians of the neighbourhood have no traditional knowledge relating to the mounds, but say that they are the remains of mud dwellings, such as are used now by the Mandans on the Upper Missouri.⁴

Mr. J. Dille has described some small mounds, existing in the State of Missouri, which he regards as being the remains of mud dwellings. They are usually of an oval form, measuring about twenty-five and eighteen feet in their two diameters, and no more than from twelve to eighteen inches in height. They are very numerous, particularly about the head waters of the St. Francis River, and are always near streams and watercourses. They are invariably arranged in straight lines, with broad streets intervening between them, crossing each

³ Stevens, *Flint Chips*, p. 352.

⁴ *Ancient Monuments of the Misisipi Valley*, pp. 155, *et seq.*

other at right angles. Sometimes as many as two hundred of these mounds occur in a single group. Mr. Dille excavated several of them, but only succeeded in finding charcoal and a few fragments of pottery.⁵

CROMLECHS OR DOLMENS.

Neither of these names is a good one. The original appellations have been lost long ago, and we have to make use of terms which have possibly been invented by antiquaries in comparatively modern times. We shall speak of these structures as cromlechs, as being a better and older name than dolmens.

Popular fancy has seen in the large horizontal stones which form the covering of cromlechs a resemblance to quoits, and has called them by that name. Sir Norman Lockyer says that in south-west England the top stone of a cromlech is called a quoit. Cromlechs are known by that name in Cornwall, and also in Ireland. A solitary stone at Stanton Drew is called Hauteville's Quoit.⁶ Three large stones at Stanton Harcourt are known as the Devil's Quoits.

In Ireland, according to Wood-Martin, a cromlech is called a "labby"—a word which is said to mean bed.⁷ "It has been supposed," says Mr. Baring-Gould, "that the cromlechs, or dolmens, and the kistvaens, represent the ancient dwellings of neolithic man. I do not think so. The position of the bodies shows that they were intended, not as dwellings, but as beds. If they resembled anything in life, it was the bed-compartments in the huts themselves."⁸

CROMLECHS CALLED "HOUSES."

In France cromlechs are called *cabannes des fées*,

⁵ Stevens, *Flint Chips*, p. 366.

⁶ For quoits in Cornwall see Windle's *Remains of the Pre-historic Age in England*, p. 195.

⁷ *Pagan Ireland*, p. 195.

⁸ *Strange Survivals*, 1892, p. 104.

fairies' cotes, and in Ireland they are known as fairies' houses. The Arabs call them "houses of the ghoul." The well-known cromlech near Aylesford in Kent, called Kits Coty House, seems to have been regarded as the dwelling of a sprite or fairy whose name was Kit. For, according to Aubrey, the *ignis fatuus* was called Kit of the Candlestick, or Kit with the Candlestick.⁹ Under the name of "Cits cotihous" this cromlech is described by Stow in his *Annales*, 1592, p. 55, and it seems to have been regarded as a place of shelter from the wind and rain. It is an open-sided cromlech, and only the cromlechs closed on all sides are said to have been tombs. Stukely says that it formerly stood at the end of a long barrow. There is a similar allusion to the occupation of a tomb by a mythological being in Hob Hurst's House, a tomb on Beeley Moor in Derbyshire opened by Bateman.¹⁰ "Hurst" here stands for "thurs," "thyrs," "a wicked spirit." The fact that cromlechs or other prehistoric structures should have been popularly regarded as the dwellings of fairies (which represent the spirits of the dead) does not prove that such structures were regarded as having been the houses of the living. It is merely evidence of a belief that the dead continued to dwell in their houses.

WAS THE CROMLECH A DWELLING PLACE?

Max Müller said "children all over the world, if building houses with cards, will build cromlechs; and people all over the world, if the neighbourhood supplied large slabs of stone, will put these together to keep out the sun or the wind, and put a fourth stone on the top to keep out the rain."¹¹ It has been remarked that "megalithic tomb-structures perpetuate the characteristics of the

⁹ *Remaines of Gentilisme* (Folklore Society), p. 243.

¹⁰ *Ten years' Diggings*, p. 87. Bateman is mistaken in saying that this barrow is on Baslow Moor.

¹¹ *Anthropological Journal* (o.s.), vii., p. 26.

houses and mode of life of the living." ¹² In Ireland the top-stones of cromlechs are sometimes of enormous weight. At Mount Brown the top-stone is estimated to weigh 110 tons, another at Howth is estimated to weigh about 90 tons, and another about 75 tons. People would hardly have put such heavy roofs on houses, though they might have put heavy stones on the tops of tombs in the belief that they would keep the dead down. Borlase, however, gives instances in Ireland of wells near cromlechs and of wells covered by cromlechs, ¹³ and this is evidence of human occupation. In North Wales there is a cromlech with two chambers, and another with three. The same thing is found in Etruria. Cromlechs in Japan are rudely rectangular chambers entered through a gallery.

The Hunebedden (Giants' graves) at Drenthe in Holland, which are really cromlechs, are approached by so-called portals, and stand mostly on the tops of low barrows or hills. In India non-sepulchral cromlechs are used as temples. Some cromlechs had carvings, such as hunting and processional groups, on the inner faces of the slabs. The floors and ceilings of two French cromlechs are of oak. ¹⁴ Wood-Martin says that Irish cromlechs are almost invariably surrounded by a circle of large stones. The circle is often double; the inner one is formed of smaller stones placed edge to edge. ¹⁵ The evidence does not permit us to say that cromlechs were at any time dwelling houses.

A GREEK HOUSE-BURIAL.

The following lines were written by Antipater Sidonius who flourished about 106 B.C. :--

Χειμερίου νιφετῶιο περὶ θριγκῶϊσι τακέντος
δῶμα πέσον τῆν γραῦν ἔκτανε Λυσιδικῆν

¹² *Man*, 1901, no. 88.

¹³ Sir Norman Lockyer's *Stonehenge*, p. 119, referring to Borlase, *Dolmens of Ireland*, i., p. 3.

¹⁴ *Journal of Antropological Institute* (o.s.), xix, p. 90.

¹⁵ *Pagan Ireland*, p. 263.

σῆμα δέ οἱ κωμῆται ὀμώλακες οὐκ ἀπ' ὀρυκτῆς
γαίης, ἀλλ' αὐτὸν πύργον ἔθεντο τάφον.

Greek Anthol., vi, 402.

"When the winter snow had melted round the eaves, the house fell and killed the old woman Lusidiké; and the neighbouring country-folk made for her a grave-mound not out of dug earth, but they made the hut itself into a tomb."¹⁶

Here we have a clear case of house-burial. But it may be asked: Would Lusidiké have been buried in her house if it had not fallen upon her? Had she become ill she would not have been allowed to die in the house if that could have been prevented. As she died in the house, it became polluted, and she had to be buried in it. We may suppose that a mound of some kind was thrown up over the house.

When a Navaho Indian dies within a house, "the rafters are pulled down over the remains, and the place is usually set on fire. After that nothing could induce a Navaho to touch a piece of the wood or even approach the immediate vicinity of the place; even years afterwards such places are recognised and avoided." The reason is that the place and all about it are the especial locale of the shade of the spirit of the departed.¹⁷ Traces of pieces of wood were found in the outer basin of a so-called "altar" mound in Ohio. They were four or five feet in length, and six or eight inches in diameter. These had been partially burnt, and the carbonized surface had preserved their casts in the earth, although the wood itself had entirely perished. The pieces of wood had been covered up whilst still burning, for the earth around them was slightly baked.¹⁸ Possibly here also the rafters had been pulled down over the remains of a hut and burnt.

¹⁶ For the extract from the Greek Anthology the writer is indebted to his friend Mr. C. J. Battersby, M.A. The translation is by him.

¹⁷ Frazer, *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, 1918, iii., p. 234.

¹⁸ Stevens, *Flint Chips*, pp. 356-7.

THE FORDWICH STONE.

There is a solid oolite stone at Fordwich church near Canterbury, weighing about fifteen hundredweight, which seems to have been originally fixed on the top of a grave. One side has no ornamentation, showing that it must have stood against a wall. It is not a shrine, as Hasted thought it was, but a very remarkable representation of a house (fig. 1). On the decorated side there are nineteen

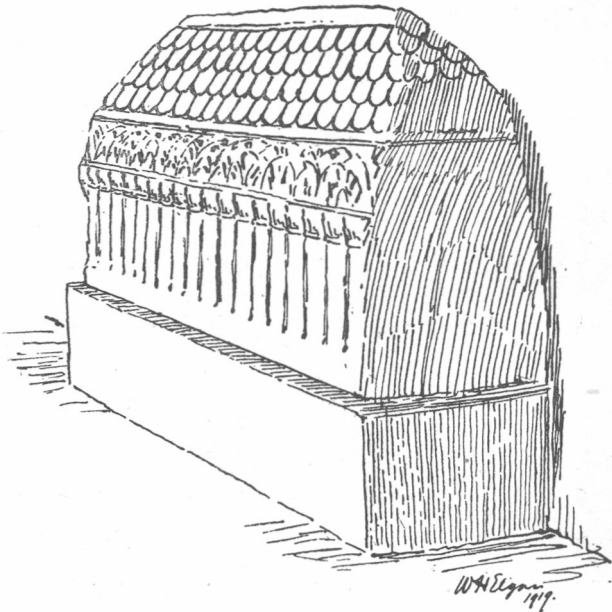


FIG. 1.—THE FORDWICH STONE.

pillars surmounted by interlacing work in the Norman style. The stone stands on a deep plinth, and its present length is 5 ft. 6 in. The ends are said to have been curtailed. But this opinion may be doubted, at least as regards one of the ends, for at one gable there is a representation of a hipped roof. The sloping roof is covered by imitations of four rows of rounded tiles, and the roof

itself slopes gently down to the ends, as in a "hogback."¹⁹ The stone is in fact a larger and better "hogback" than those which have been described on a previous page. This sculptured monument shows again how lasting was the connexion between the house and the grave. When men ceased to bury a dead man in his house, the tradition was continued in a tomb representing a house. "In the north of Russia," says Sir Arthur Evans, "I have seen wooden sheds imitating dwelling-houses built over the graves in an orthodox churchyard." (*Macmillan's Magazine*, xliii, 227). There is a modern stone tomb, roofed like a house, in Silkstone churchyard, Yorkshire.

It will be noticed that the Fordwich stone, like the typical "inverted" British burial urn, is divided into three parts—plinth, house-body, and roof. This resemblance is very remarkable, and entitled to great weight.

LONG BARROWS.

We have seen that some round barrows, with their trenches, doorways, fragments of domestic pottery, and waste pieces of animal food, are in all probability the remains of huts which had become the graves of their former inhabitants.

We have now to consider whether traces of house-burial existed in the class of barrows known as long barrows.

That long barrows preserve the forms of a class of contemporary houses is so highly probable as to amount almost to certainty. Let us see what these forms are. These barrows are very long in proportion to their breadth. In nearly every case their long diameter runs approximately east and west. This is exactly what we

¹⁹ See a full account with copious illustrations by Mr. Walter Derham in the *British Archaeological Journal*, xxiv. (n.s.), pp. 111-128. Mr. Derham also gives a picture of the sarcophagus of Galla Placidia at Ravenna (fifth century). This has a tiled roof with two doors on one side.

see in our oldest churches, where the orientation is not always exact, but approximate. In these barrows, as in the churches, the long diameter not unfrequently runs from the north-east to the south-west, thereby exposing the structure to the greatest possible amount of sunlight.

The east end of long barrows is much wider and considerably higher than the west. They frequently contain a chamber, or chambers, of varied size and form, and these are nearly always at the east end. The chambers are approached by galleries or passages. It is not enough to say that the chamber is a copy of the habitation of the living. The whole structure of the barrow, with its surrounding walls is a copy, not only of a long house, but of its adjoining courtyard.

“ The similarity of the winter houses of Arctic peoples, with their covering of earth, to the chambered barrows suggested the reasonable explanation that these barrows were really survivals of actual houses. It is a common practice among primitive peoples to bury a man in his own house, or, by a development of this idea, in a tomb resembling a house ; and it is therefore natural to infer that the chambered barrows are tombs of this description.²⁰

Had any of these long chambered barrows formerly been houses of the living, or were they all tombs from the first? Can we believe that every trace of prehistoric long houses has disappeared?

Let us take a well-known example of these barrows. The chambered long barrow at West Kennet, near Avebury, in Wiltshire, was 336 feet long when Dr. Thurnam excavated it in 1860. It was 40 feet wide at the west end and 75 feet at the east, and this was the higher end (about 8 feet). The whole of the chamber was within 60 feet of the east end. Originally there was a line of upright sarsen-stones all round the foot of the

²⁰ Thurnam in *Archaeologia*; Sir C. H. Read, *Guide to the Stone Age*, pp. 131, 133.

barrow, the space between them being filled with dry walling in horizontal courses. The chamber, with the gallery by which it was approached, was roofed with stone slabs, some of which were in position, and weighed about a ton each. Roughly the chamber was about 10 feet in diameter, and the gallery about 15 feet long. In the chalk rubble within were found four skeletons with long skulls, accompanied by fragments of domestic pottery. The fragments were in three separate heaps, but very few pieces of the same vessel were found, and it was clear that they had been subsequently collected. It would appear from this that the fragments were household refuse, and the late Mr. Albert Way thought that this tomb had subsequently been occupied as a dwelling. Is it not more likely that a chamber once occupied as a dwelling had become a tomb? Besides the fragments of pottery, nearly 300 flint flakes were collected, some being finished tools and most of them milky white. The chamber had been opened and used again for subsequent burials.

It is very interesting to compare the wonderful discovery at Bleasdale, already described, with the form of the barrow at West Kennet and with many similar long barrows. It is very interesting also to compare the barrow, once a dwelling-place, at Hanging Grimston, already described. At Bleasdale the circular house (if such it was) was on the east part of the enveloping circle; at West Kennet the chamber is at the east end of the barrow. At Bleasdale a ring of wood posts, with smaller posts entirely filling the spaces between them, formed the circular fence; at West Kennet there were corresponding posts of stone all round the barrow, the interstices being filled by dry walls. At Bleasdale the enclosure was a perfect circle; the enclosure at West Kennet differed in being pear-shaped. Furthermore, many long barrows, from the south-west of England to Caithness, were horned,

that is to say, the long walls on each side were curved inwards at the east end, making a figure something like the conventional representations of the human heart. Between the horns a doorway opened, giving access to the chamber. At Bleasdale, as will be seen on the plan, the circular house had a wide curved opening corresponding to the horns of long barrows.

From evidence like this we are enabled to see the plan on which the British house—probably a chief's house—was laid out both in the Neolithic Age and in the Bronze Age. This house, whether circular or rectangular, stood at the east end of a fenced courtyard. The form of the long barrow, says Mr. Walter Johnson, “is believed to have been based on the dwelling of the deceased occupant. The galleried entrance and the encircling ring of stones may stand for the stockaded settlement.”²¹

We may infer that the long barrows were earlier than the remains at Bleasdale. It is true that in some Yorkshire long barrows Canon Greenwell found that cremation had been usual, the mound being erected over flues lined with stones. But this kind of burial, as Sir C. H. Read says, “cannot without further evidence be regarded as typical of the neolithic period.”

BURIAL IN COMMUNAL DWELLINGS.

The Aleutian Indians have “large communal dwellings or yurts, where the inmates entered by a hole in the roof, descending by a notched upright beam, and the space within was divided around into compartments like the state cabins of a steamer.” Here “the dead were sometimes enclosed in the apartment they had occupied while living, which was filled up with earth, while the other inmates remained in their rooms.”²²

Long communal houses are found in various parts of

²¹ *Folk-Memory*, 1908, p. 71.

²² *Journal of Anthropological Institute* (o.s.), x., p. 443.

the world. It is said of those in New Guinea that "to peep into one is like looking through a railway tunnel, light appearing at the other end through a small door."²³ Dyak houses in Borneo are 500 feet in length.

There are chambered long barrows in England which remind us of communal houses in other parts of the world; for instance that at Ulley in Gloucestershire, or that at Stoney Littleton in Somersetshire. They are not so long, consisting of not more than five or six rooms opening out of a passage. But the principle is the same, and we are reminded of the English custom of building houses in bays, some of these houses being of considerable length.

HOUSE-BURIAL OF CHILDREN.

Mr. G. A. Garfitt has kindly drawn the writer's attention to cases of child burial in the house, as described in *Explorations in Turkestan* in 1904, vol. i., pp. 37-39, and in other places of the work. The children were buried in the embryonic position, accompanied by beads, &c. This practice had continued for 2,000 years. No adults were buried under the floors. The present writer has noticed other cases of child-burial in the house, and reference has already been made to the burial of Roman children under the eaves of the house.

In Russia the peasants bury still-born children under the threshold, and in other parts of the world still-born children are buried in the doorway, or in the yard of the house. This was done, according to Sir J. G. Frazer, in order to secure their re-birth.²⁴

BURIAL AT THE DOORWAY OF THE HOUSE.

We have already seen that, according to the Laxdale Saga, a man who had fled from the British Isles was buried in the doorway of his hall, "so that he might keep a searching eye on his dwelling." Among the

²³ *Op. cit.*, xix., p. 470.

²⁴ *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, 1918, iii., p. 13.

Wataveta of East Africa "men who have issue are as a rule interred at the door of the hut of their eldest surviving wife, whose duty it is to see that the remains are not disturbed by a stray hyena. The Munjari family and the Ndighiri clan, however, prefer making the grave inside the wife's hut. Women are buried near the doors of their own houses." ²⁵

THE TRUNCATED TOPS OF BRITISH BURIAL-URNS.

The truncated tops of such urns as those at Flaxdale in Derbyshire, or that at Crookes near Sheffield, already described, have been regarded as a difficulty in the way of maintaining that such urns represent wattled huts resting on a plinth or foundation of stones. It is said that a circular hut could not have had a flat top; it would have to come to a point, or something like it. Yet an urn with a truncated top was found at Aschersleben which had a door on one side and a roof representing thatch or reeds. The circular huts of North American Indians are supported by a ring of poles meeting together at the summit. These poles, however, project above the roof, and could not have been represented in burial urns, so that the roof had to be represented by a flat top. Some of these huts are figured in Catlin's *North American Indians*, 1841, p. 82, and the remarkable feature in them is that the posts are gathered into a plexus which projects above the covering or wall of the hut. There is an opening about four feet wide at the top for a smokehole.

ERRATUM.

The two urns figured on p. 86 of vol. xli. have been inadvertently described as "Albanian," instead of "Alban."

^[25] Frazer, *Folklore in the Old Testament*, 1918, iii., p. 13, referring to *Journal of the African Society*, No. 1 (October, 1901), p. 121.